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# Daily Breeze

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## Region outlook dim in report

**GOVERNMENT:** Association predicts larger budget shortfalls, increased traffic, deteriorating air quality and more if trends aren't reversed.

By Gordon Smith  
COPLEY NEWS SERVICE

The Los Angeles region's traffic congestion and air quality, already the nation's worst, will deteriorate further if transportation funding cuts proposed by Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger are adopted, officials from the Southern California Association of Governments said Thursday.

The governor's proposed budget would leave Los Angeles County and its neighboring counties with a \$4.3 billion shortfall in funds that were expected to flow in for transportation projects, the officials said. That in turn could jeopardize an additional \$8 billion in federal funding, and would likely leave drivers in the region stranded in traffic for longer than the average 50 hours a year they currently spend.

The predictions came as SCAG released its annual report card, which uses the latest available information to provide a snapshot of regional trends in housing, education, public safety, employment, transpor-

## REPORT: Region gets low marks in air quality, housing

FROM PAGE A1

tation and other basic categories. This year's report card is based primarily on data from 2002.

Air quality and traffic congestion received a C and a D-, respectively. Smog in the Los Angeles metropolitan area went downhill after a decade of steady improvement, and traffic delays cost the region \$13.8 billion in lost productivity and other costs — far more than the second-place New York metropolitan area, which lost \$8.4 billion.

Also receiving D's were housing and education. The percentage of residents who can afford a median-priced home dropped to 31 percent as housing prices spurted. Meanwhile, eighth-graders throughout much of the region continued to perform below the national median in reading and math test scores, researchers found.

The region received no A's, and attained B's only in employment and public safety, which showed slight gains over the previous year.

"This is not the report card I'd want to bring home to my mom," said Santa Monica City Councilwoman Pam O'Connor, a member of SCAG's regional council.

SCAG is designated by federal and state government to research and develop plans for transportation, growth management and other issues within Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside, San Bernardino, Ventura and Imperial

counties.

The looming cuts in transportation funds have the agency's officials especially spooked. The cuts could unravel carefully crafted plans to reduce vehicle emissions and comply with federal clean air goals, which could lead federal officials to start withholding \$8 billion in transportation funds beginning in June.

The projects in jeopardy include a broad range of road, freeway and mass-transit improvements. Many will be delayed or axed under Schwarzenegger's budget proposal even if state voters approve \$15 billion in borrowing that the new governor has proposed to help the state deal with its current fiscal crisis.

Still, the situation for Southern California will get even worse if the \$15 billion bond measure is defeated, a SCAG official warned.

"We will get through this. But we're getting to the point that we're at crisis, and we're going to have to make some hard choices. The easy choices are all gone," said Bev Perry, president of SCAG's regional council and a Brea city councilwoman.

A fundamental trend driving many of the region's problems is population growth. The six-county SCAG region, which has a population of more than 17 million people, is expected to increase by an additional 6 million by 2030. About half the growth currently comes from births within the region.

### STUDY LOOKS INTO THE AIR:

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A3